

SOME
A C C O U N T
O F T H E
L A T E W O R K O F G O D
I N
N O R T H - A M E R I C A
I N A
S E R M O N

O n E Z E K I E L i. 16.

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L O N D O N :

Printed and sold at the New Chapel, City Road ; and
at the Rev. Mr. WESLEY'S Preaching-Houses, in
Town and Country. 1788

[Price TWO-PENCE]

EZEKIEL i. 16.

*The appearance was, as it were a wheel
in the middle of a wheel.*

1. **W**HATEVER may be the primary meaning of this mysterious passage of Scripture, many serious Christians in all ages have applied it in a secondary sense, to the manner wherein the adorable Providence of God usually works in governing the world. They have judged this expression manifestly to allude to the complicated wheels of his Providence, adapting one event to another, and working one thing by means of another. In the whole process of this, there is an endless variety of wheels within wheels. But they are frequently so disposed and complicated, that we cannot understand them at first sight. Nay, we can seldom fully comprehend them, till they are explained by the event.

2. Perhaps no Age ever afforded a more striking instance of this kind than the present does, in the Dispensations of Divine Providence, with respect to our Colonies in *North America*. In order to see this clearly, let us endeavour, according to the measure of our weak understanding,

First, To trace each wheel apart: And,

Secondly, To consider both, as they relate to, and answer each other.

I. And first, We are to trace each wheel apart.

It is by no means my design, to give particular detail of the late transactions in America; but barely to give a simple and naked deduction of a few well known facts.

I know, This very delicate subject; and that it is difficult, if not impossible, to treat it in such a manner as not to offend any; particularly those who are warmly attached to either party. But I would not willingly offend; and shall therefore studiously avoid all keen and reproachful language, and use the softest terms I can,

without either betraying or disguising the Truth.

1. In the year 1736, it pleased God to begin a work of grace in the newly planted Colony of *Georgia*; then the Southernmost of our settlements on the Continent of *America*. To those *English* who had settled there the year before, were then added a body of *Moravians*, so called: And a larger body, who had been expelled from Germany by the Archbishop of *Salzburg*. These were men truly fearing God and working righteousness. At the same time there had been an awakening among the *English*, both at *Savannah* and *Frederica*: May enquiring, "What they must do to be saved?" and *bringing forth fruits meet for Repentance*.

2. In the same year there broke out a wonderful work of God, in several parts of *New England*, It began in *Northampton*, and in a little time appeared in the adjoining towns. A particular and beautiful account of this was published by Mr. *Edwards*, Minister of *Northampton*. Many sinners were deeply convinced of sin, and many truly converted to God. I suppose, there had been no instance in *America*, of so swift and deep a work of Grace, for an hundred years before: Nay, nor perhaps since the *English* settled there.

3. The following year, the work of God spread by degrees from *New England* towards the South. At the same time it advanced by slow degrees from *Georgia* towards the North. In a few souls it deepened likewise; and some of them witnessed a good confession, both in life and in death.

4. In the year 1738, Mr. Whitefield came over to *Georgia*, with a design to assist me in preaching, either to the *English* or the *Indians*. But as I was embarked for *England* before he arrived, he preached to the *English* altogether, first in *Georgia*, to which his chief service was due, then in *South* and *North Carolina*, and afterwards in the intermediate Provinces, till he came to *New England*. And all men owned that God was with him, wheresoever he went; giving a General Call, to high and low, rich and poor, to "repent and believe the Gospel." Many were not disobedient to the heavenly calling; they did repent and believe the Gospel. And by his Ministry a line of Communication was formed, quite from *Georgia* to *New England*.

5. Within a few years he made several more voyages to *America*, and took several more journeys through the Provinces. And in every journey he found fresh reasons to bless God, who still prospered the work of his hands; there being more and more in all the Provinces, who found his word to be *the power of God unto salvation*.

6. But the last journey he made, he acknowledged to some of his friends, that he had much sorrow and heaviness in his heart, on account of similar multitudes who for a time ran well, but afterwards *drew back into perdition*. Indeed in a few years, the greater part of those who had *received the word with joy, yea, had escaped the corruption that is in the world*, were *entangled again and overcome*. Some were like those who *received the feed on stony ground*, which *in time of temptation withered away*. Others were like those who *received it among thorns*: the thorns soon *sprang up and choked it*. Insomuch that he found exceeding few, who *brought forth fruit to perfection*. A vast majority had entirely *turned back from the holy commandment once delivered to them*.

7. And what wonder? For it was a true saying, which was common in the ancient Church, "The Soul and the Body make a Man, and the Spirit and Discipline make a Christian." But those who were more or less affected by Mr. *Whitefield's* Preaching, had no Discipline at all. They had no Shadow of Discipline; nothing of the kind. They were formed into no kind of Societies. They had no Christian connexion with each other, nor were ever taught to watch over each other's souls. So that if they fell into luke warmness, or even into sin, he had none to lift him up: He might fall lower and lower; yea into hell if he would; for who regarded it?

8. They were in this state, when about eleven years ago, I received several Letters from *America*, giving a melancholy account of the state of Religion in most of the Colonies, and earnestly entreating, that some of our Preachers would *come over and help them*. It was believed, they might confirm many that were weak or wavering, and lift up many that were fallen: Nay, and that they would see more fruit of their labours in *America*, than they had done either in *England* or *Ireland*.

9. This was considered at large at our yearly Conference, at *Bristol*, in the year 1767. And two of our Preachers willingly offered themselves, viz. *Richard Boardman* and *Joseph Pillmoor*. They were men well reported of by all, and (we believed) fully qualified for the work. Accordingly, after a few days spent in *London*, they cheerfully went over. They laboured first in *Philadelphia* and *New York*: Afterwards in many other places. And every where God was eminently with them, and gave them to see much fruit of their labour. What was wanting before, was now supplied: Those who were desirous to save their souls, were no longer a rope of sand, but clave to one another, and began to watch over each other in love. Societies were formed, and Christian Discipline introduced in all its branches. Within a few years after, several more of the Preachers were willing to go and assist them. And God raised up many native of the country, who were glad to act in connexion with them: till there were two and twenty Travelling Preachers in *America*, who kept their circuits as regularly as those in *England*.

10. The work of God then not only spread wider, particularly in *North Carolina*, *Maryland*, *Virginia*, *Pennsylvania*, and the *Jerseys*, but sunk abundantly deeper than ever it had done before. So that at the beginning of the late troubles, there were three thousand souls connected together in religious Societies: And a great number of these witnessed, that the Son of God hath power on earth to forgive sin.

11. But now it was, that a bar appeared in the way, a grand hindrance to the progress of Religion. The immense *Trade of America*, greater in proportion than even that of the Mother Country, brought an immense flow of *Wealth*; which was also continually increasing. Hence both Merchants and Tradesmen of various kinds, accumulated money without end; and rose from indigence to opulent fortunes, quicker than any could do in *Europe*. Riches poured in upon them as a flood, and treasures were heaped up as the sand of the sea. And hence naturally arose unbounded *Plenty*, of all the Necessaries, Conveniences, yea and Superfluities of Life.

12. One general consequence of this was *Pride*. The more Riches they acquired, the more they were regarded by their neighbours, as men of weight and importance. And they would naturally see themselves, in at least as fair a light as their neighbours saw them. And accordingly, as they rose in the world, they rose in their opinion of themselves; As it is generally allowed,

"A thousand pound supplies
The want of twenty thousand qualities;"

So the richer they grew, the more admiration they gained, and the more applause they received. Wealth then bringing in more applause, of course brought in more *Pride*, till they really thought themselves as much wiser, as they were wealthier than their neighbours.

13. Another natural consequence of Wealth was *Luxury*, particularly in Food. We are apt to imagine, nothing can exceed the luxurious living, which now prevails in *Great Britain* and *Ireland*. But alas! what is this to that which lately prevailed in *Philadelphia* and other parts of *North America*? A merchant or middling Tradesman there, kept a table equal to that of a Nobleman in *England*: Entertaining his guests with ten, twelve, yea sometimes twenty dishes of meat at a meal! And this was so far from being blamed by any one, that it was applauded as Generosity and Hospitality.

14. And is not *Idleness* naturally joined with *fullness of bread*? Does not *Sloth* easily spring from *Luxury*? It did so here in an eminent degree; such *Sloth* as is scarce named in *England*. Persons in the bloom of youth, and in perfect health, could hardly bear to put on their own clothes. The *Slave* must be called to do this, and that, and every thing: It is too great labour for the Master or Mistress! It is a wonder they would be at the pains of putting meat into their own mouths! Why did they not imitate the lordly lubbers in *China*, who are fed by a slave standing on each side.

15. Who can wonder, if *Sloth* alone beget *Wantonness*? Has it not always had this effect? Was it not said near two thousand years ago,

*Quaeritur, AEgyptus quare sit factus adulter?
In promptu causa est: Desidiosus erat.*

And when Sloth and Luxury are joined together, will they not produce an abundant offspring? This they certainly have done in these parts. I was surprised, a few years ago, at a letter I received from *Philadelphia*, wherein were (nearly) these words. "You think the Women in *England*, (many of them, I mean) do not abound in Chastity. But yet the generality of your Women, if compared with ours, might almost pass for Vestal Virgins." Now this complication of Pride, Luxury, Sloth, and Wantonness, naturally arising from vast Wealth and Plenty, was the grand hindrance to the spreading of true Religion through the Cities of *North America*.

II. Let us now see the other Wheel of Divine Providence.

1. It may be reasonably supposed, that the Colonies in New England had from their very beginning, an hankering after Independency. It could not be expected to be otherwise, considering their Families, their Education, their Relations, and the Connexions they had formed before they left their native Country. They were farther inclined to it, by the severe and unjust treatment which many of them had met with in *England*. This might well create in them a fear, lest they should meet with the like again, a jealousy of their Governors, and a desire of shaking off that Dependence, to which they were never thoroughly reconciled. The same Spirit they communicated to their Children, from whom it descended to the present Generation. Nor could it be effaced by all the Favours and Benefits, which they continually received from the *English* Government.

2. This Spirit generally prevailed, especially in *Boston*, as early as the year 1737. In that year, my Brother being detained there some time, was greatly surprised to hear almost in every company, whether Ministers, Gentlemen, Merchants, or Common People, where any thing of the kind was mentioned, "We must be independent; We will

bear the *English* yoke no longer. We will be our own Governors." This appeared to be even then the General Desire of the People: Although it is not probable, that there was at that time any formed design. No; they could not be so vain, as to think they were able to stand alone against the power of *Great Britain*.

3. A Gentleman who was there in the following year, observed the same spirit in every corner of the town; "Why should these *English* Blockheads rule over US?" was then the common language. And as one encouraged another herein, the spirit of Independency rose higher and higher, till it began to spread into the other Colonies, bordering upon *New England*. Nevertheless the fear of their troublesome Neighbours, then in possession of *Canada*, kept them within bounds, and for a time prevented the flame from breaking out. But when the English had removed that fear from them, when *Canada* was ceded to the King of Great Britain: The Desire then ripened into a formed design. Only a Convenient opportunity was wanting.

4. It was not long before that Opportunity appeared. The Stamp-Act was passed and sent over to *America*. The Malcontents saw and pressed their advantage: They represented it as a common Cause; and by proper Emissaries spread their own spirit through another and another Colony. By inflammatory Papers of every kind, they stirred up the minds of the People. They vilified first the *English Ministry*, representing them, one and all, as the veriest wretches alive, void of all Honesty, Honour and Humanity. By the same methods they next inflamed the People in general against the *British* Parliament, representing them as the most infamous villains upon the earth, as a company of base, unprincipled hirelings. But still they affected to reverence the King, and spoke very honourably of him. Not long: A few months after, they treated *him* in the same manner they had done his Ministers and his Parliament.

5. Matters being now, it was judged, in sufficient forwardness, an Association was formed between Northern and Southern Colonies, both took up arms, and constituted a Supreme Power, which they termed *The Congress*. But still they affirmed, their whole Design was

to secure their Liberty: And even to insinuate, that they aimed at any thing more, was said to be quite cruel and unjust. But in a little time they threw off the mask, and boldly asserted their own Independency. According to Dr. *Witherspoon*, President of the college in *New Jersey*, in his address to the Congress, (added to a Fast Sermon, published by him, August 3rd, 1776) uses the following words: "It appears now, in the clearest manner, that till very lately, those who seemed to take the part of *America*, in the *British* Parliament, never did it on *American* Principles. They either did not understand, or were not willing to admit, the Extent of our Claim. Even the great Lord *Chatham's* Bill for Reconciliation, would not have been accepted here, and *did not materially differ from what the Ministry would have consented to.*" Here it is avowed, that their claim was *Independency*; and that they would accept of nothing less.

6. By this open and avowed defection from, and defiance of their Mother Country (whether it was defensible, or not, is another question:) at least nine parts in ten, of their immense trade to *Europe, Asia, Africa*, and other parts of *America* were cut off at one stroke. In lieu of this they gained at first perhaps an hundred thousand pounds a year by their numerous Privateers. But even then, this was upon the whole, no gain at all; for they lost as many ships as they took. Afterwards they took fewer and fewer: and in the mean time they lost four or five millions yearly, (perhaps six or seven) which their trade brought them in. What was the necessary consequence of this? Why, that as the fountain of their Wealth was dammed up, the streams of it must run lower and lower, till they were wholly exhausted. So that at present, these Provinces are no richer than the poorest parts either of *Scotland* or *Ireland*.

7. Plenty declined in the same proportion as Wealth, till universal Scarcity took place. In a short time, there was everywhere felt a deep want not only of Superfluities, not only of the common Conveniences, but even of the Necessaries of life. Wholesome food was not to be procured, but at very advanced price. Decent Apparel was not to be had, not even in the large towns. Not only velvets and silks, and fashionable ornaments, (which might well be spared) but

even Linen and woollen Cloths were not to be purchased at any price whatsoever.

8. Thus have we observed each of these Wheels apart: On the one hand, Trade, Wealth, Pride, Luxury, Sloth, and Wantonness spreading far and wide, through the American Provinces: On the other the Spirit of Independency, diffusing itself from North to South. Let us now observe how each of these Wheels relates to, and answers the other: How the wise and gracious Providence of God, uses one to check the course of the other, and even employs (if so strong an expression might be allowed) Satan to cast out Satan! Probably the subtle Spirit hoped, by adding to all those other vices, the spirit of Independency, to have overturned the whole work of God, as well as the *British* Government in *North America*. But He that sitteth in Heaven laughed him to scorn, and took the wise in his own craftiness. By means of this very spirit there is reason to believe, God will overturn every hindrance of that work.

9. We have seen, how by the breaking out of this spirit, in open defiance of the *British* Government, an effectual check was given to the trade of those Colonies. They themselves, by a wonderful stroke of Policy, threw up the whole trade of their Mother Country and all its Dependencies! Made an Act, That no *British* Ship should enter into any of their Harbours! Nay, they fitted out numberless Privateers, which seized upon all the *British* ships they could find. The King's Ships seized an equal number of their's. So their foreign trade too was brought almost to nothing. Their riches died away with their Trade. Especially as they had no Internal Resources. The flower of their youth, before employed in Husbandry, being now drawn off into their armies, so that the most fruitful lands were of no use, none being left to till the ground. And when Wealth fled away, (as was before observed) so did Plenty too: Abundance of all things being succeeded by scarcity in all things.

10. The Wheel now began to move within the Wheel. The Trade and Wealth of the *Americans* failing, the grand incentives of Pride failed also: for few admire or flatter the Poor. And being deserted by most of their admirers, they did not altogether so much admire

themselves. Especially when they found, upon the trial, that they had grievously miscalculated their own strength; which they had made no doubt would be sufficient to carry all before it. It is true, many of them still exalted themselves; but others were truly and deeply humbled.

11. Poverty and Scarcity consequent upon it, struck still more directly at the root of their *Luxury*. There was no place now for that immoderate Superfluity either of Food or Apparel. They sought no more, and could seldom obtain so much as plain food, sufficient to sustain nature. And they were content if they could procure coarse apparel, to keep them clean and warm. Thus they were reduced to the same condition as their Forefathers were in, when the Providence of God brought them to this Country. They were nearly in the same outward circumstances. Happy, if they were likewise in the same spirit!

12. Poverty and Want struck at the root of *Sloth* also. It was now no time to say, "*A little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little more folding of the hands to rest.*" If a man could not work now, it was plain, he could not eat. All the pains he could take were little enough to procure the bare necessities of life: Seeing, on the one hand, so few of them remained; their own armies having swept away all before them: And, on the other, what remained bore so high a price, that exceeding few were able to purchase them.

13. Thus by the adorable Providence of God, the main hindrances of this work are removed. And in how wonderful a manner! Such as it never could have entered into the heart of man to conceive. These hindrances had been growing up and continually increasing for many years. What God foresaw would prove the Remedy, grew up with the Disease: and, when the Disease was come to its height, then only began to operate. Immense Trade, Wealth, and Plenty begot and nourished proportionable Pride, and Luxury, and Sloth, and Wantonness. Meantime the same Trade, Wealth, and Plenty, begot or nourished the Spirit of Independency. Who would have imagined, that this evil Disease would lay a foundation for the cure of all the rest? And yet so it was. For this Spirit now come to maturity, and

disdaining all restraint, is now swiftly destroying the Trade, and Wealth, and Plenty, whereby it was nourished, and thereby makes way for the happy return of Humility, Temperance, Industry, and Chastity. Such unspeakable Good does the all-wise God bring out of all this evil! So does *the fierceness of man*, of the *Americans*, turn to *his praise*, in a very different sense from what Dr. Witherspoon supposes.

14. May we not observe, how exactly in this grand scene of Providence one wheel answers to the other? The Spirit of *Independency*, which our poet so justly terms,

"The glorious fault of Angels and of God;"

(that is in plain terms, of Devils) the same which so many call Liberty, is over-ruled by the Justice and Mercy of God, first to punish those crying sins, and afterwards to heal them. He punishes them by Poverty, coming as an armed man, and over-running the land; by such scarcity as has hardly been known there for an hundred years past: by Want of every kind, even of necessary Clothing, even of Bread to eat. But with what intent does he do this? Surely that Mercy may rejoice over Judgement. He punishes, that he may amend: that he may first make them sensible of their sins, which any one that has eyes to see may read in their Punishment: and then bring them back to the spirit of their forefathers, the spirit of Humility, Temperance, Industry, Chastity: yea, and, a General Willingness to hear and receive the Word, which is able to save their souls. *O the depth, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements! And his ways past finding out!* Unless so far as they are revealed in his Word and explained by his Providence!

15. From these we learn that the Spiritual Blessings are what God principally intends in all these severe Dispensations. He intends they should all work together, for the destruction of Satan's kingdom, and the promotion of the kingdom of his dear Son; that they should all minister to the general spread of righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. But after the inhabitants of these Provinces are

brought again to *seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness*, there can be no doubt, but *all other things*, all temporal Blessings *will be added* unto them. He will send though all the happy land, with all the Necessaries and Conveniences of Life, not *Independency*, (which would be no blessing, but an heavy curse, both to them and their Children) but *Liberty*, real, legal Liberty! which is an unspeakable Blessing. He will superadd to Christian Liberty, Liberty from Sin, true Civil Liberty; a Liberty from Oppression of every kind; from illegal Violence, a Liberty to enjoy their Lives, their Persons and their Property: in a word, a Liberty to be governed in all things by the Laws of their Country. They will again enjoy true *British Liberty*, such as they enjoyed before these commotions: Neither less, nor more than they have enjoyed, from their first settlement in *America*.

Neither less nor more than is now enjoyed by the inhabitants of their Mother Country. If their Mother Country had ever designed to deprive them of this, she might have done it long ago: And that this was never done, is a demonstration, that it was never intended. But God permitted this strange dread of imaginary evils to spread over all the people, that he might have mercy upon all, that he might do good to all, by saving them from the bondage of sin, and bringing them into the glorious Liberty of the children of God.

T H E E N D.

Printed and bound for John Wesley's Chapel by :



The John Marcon Press
3 Partridge Road, Pucklechurch,
South Glos. Tel : (0117) 937 2123